

Amendment to the Specification

In the Specification, on page 9, please replace the paragraph beginning at line 2 with the following paragraph:

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The invention is a method and apparatus to prepare an acellular biocompatible biodegradable matrix having substantially uniform and symmetric reticulations that are formed by freezing an aqueous fluid containing protein, or protein and carbohydrate, at a controlled rate, and subsequent freeze-drying (lyophilization) and a uniform thickness of less than 1 mm. The reticulated matrix is capable of serving as a support or scaffold for cells inoculated thereon. The cells are animal cells, which encompass human cells. In one embodiment, the cells are epidermal and dermal cells, resulting in a cultured skin device as disclosed in co-pending related U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/092,237, entitled Surgical Device For Skin Therapy or Testing and filed on even date herewith, which is expressly incorporated by reference herein in its entirety. The device prepared using the inventive apparatus facilitates cell attachment to the multiple continuous surfaces of the matrix and maintains a desired thickness. This is in contrast to a matrix with asymmetric reticulations and less uniform thickness that is formed when a fluid containing protein, or protein and carbohydrate, contacts an open tray or pan during matrix formation.